

VZCZCXRO3135
OO RUEHBI
DE RUEHLM #1348/01 2741026
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 011026Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6894
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0434
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 7421
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5556
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4044
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1409
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8012
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5647
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2343
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001348

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS, SCA/RA, AND CA/OCS/ACS/NESCA W HURT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [CASC](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: MALDIVES: BLAST IN MALE APPARENTLY TARGETS
TOURISM, SHOCKS GOVERNMENT

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A blast in Male's Sultan Park on the afternoon of September 29 wounded 12 foreign tourists. Foreign Minister Shahid told Ambassador the same day that the Government of Maldives (GORM) was shocked by the incident and does not know who was responsible. Eleven arrests have so far been made in connection with the incident. The opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has said that the blast showed the "Government has failed to tackle crime" and "is tolerating extremism." Post has issued a warden message saying there is no need to cancel travel plans to resorts, but suggesting tourists refrain from nonessential trips to the capital for now. Regional LEGAT and A/LAT from New Delhi traveled over the weekend to Male' to provide investigative support to the Maldivian Police, and two additional FBI agents will join them this week. The Embassy issued a public statement on October 1 condemning the bombing. End Summary.

¶2. (U) A blast in Male's Sultan Park on the afternoon of September 29 wounded 12 tourists, two British, two Japanese and eight Chinese. Local media say the explosion, the first ever bomb blast in Maldives, was caused by an improvised explosive device triggered by a mobile phone. Maldives government spokesman Mohamed Shareef confirmed that 12 people received burn injuries, but were in stable condition.

Government Unsure Who to Blame

¶3. (SBU) Foreign Minister Shahid told Ambassador on September 29 that the Government of Maldives (GORM) was shocked by the incident and does not know who is responsible. President Gayoom on Sunday said publicly that groups calling for the boycott of Maldives resorts must "share some responsibility" for the incident. He did not name, but was clearly referring to, the UK-based group Friends of Maldives which has encouraged tourists to boycott those resorts that are owned by members of the Government. Ruling party spokesman Ibrahim Shafiu told the website Minivan News that "in a situation like this, you think about who your enemies are... unless proved otherwise by the investigative authorities, we will be unable to believe they are not involved in this." One unnamed government official speculated in the local press that the attack, which occurred

during Ramadan, could have been conducted "by jihadists on our tourism industry."

Opposition Blames the Government

¶4. (SBU) The opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has said that the blast showed that the "Government has failed to tackle crime." MDP spokeswoman Mariya Didi accused the Government of "tolerating extremism and not taking action against extremist activities in the country." One opposition contact made a far-fetched speculation to PolOff that the blast may have been an LTTE retaliation for recent GORM support to the Sri Lankan security forces. He also noted that the blast occurred in a site that is constantly monitored by police cameras and wondered whether perhaps the police were somehow involved.

Eleven Suspects in Custody

¶5. (SBU) Eleven arrests have been made in connection with the incident. A police spokesman told Minivan news that all arrests were based on forensic evidence. The Australian High Commission in Colombo told Pol Chief that on September 30 a Maldivian regularly residing in Colombo had been arrested in connection with the incident while attempting to leave Maldives. Embassy later learned that the individual had actually left Maldives, but was detained on arrival at the Colombo airport at the request of Maldivian officials and returned to Male'.

Travel Advice Adjusted

COLOMBO 00001348 002 OF 002

¶6. (U) Post has issued a warden message (cleared with CA) saying that resort islands and the international airport are still considered safe, but suggesting tourists refrain from nonessential trips to the capital island itself for now. (Note: Male's international airport is on a separate island, and tourists rarely visit the capital on their way to resort destinations.) The British Government has also decided to update its travel advice to include information on the incident, according to the UK High Commission in Colombo, but also is not issuing a blanket warning against travel to Maldives.

U.S. Provides Investigative Assistance

¶7. (SBU) In response to requests from President Gayoom and local law enforcement officials, LEGAT and A/LAT arrived in Male' on September 30 and October 1 from New Delhi to provide investigative support to the Maldivian Police. Two FBI agents from the Los Angeles Field Office of the Extraterritorial Investigations Unit will arrive in Male on October 3 to provide additional assistance. The presence of the team from Los Angeles will not be publicized. The Foreign Minister thanked the Ambassador for the USG's quick and helpful response.

¶8. (SBU) In a phone consultation with RSO, LEGAT noted that training on crime scene investigations provided earlier to Maldivian law enforcement authorities under ATA and other programs appeared to have paid rich dividends. Maldives police had immediately moved to secure and cordon off the blast site, preserving important evidence and collecting relevant material in evidence bags. They also immediately called for assistance. This is far above the standard normally encountered in South Asia in handling crime scenes and should greatly assist FBI and other agencies in evaluating what happened in Male'.

Embassy Issues Statement Deploing Incident

¶9. (SBU) On October 1, Post issued the following statement and published it on its websites: "The U.S. Embassy was shocked and saddened to learn of the bombing incident in Male on September 29. We express our sympathy to those who were injured, and to their families. We condemn without reservation this senseless act of violence. The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation's regional representative is currently assisting the Maldivian authorities in their investigation."

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT: The explanations proffered by both the government and opposition regarding the affiliations and motivations of those responsible for the blast strike us as politically motivated and unlikely to be borne out by the subsequent investigation. However, Maldivian authorities appear to be well on their way to identifying and detaining those involved. The wide array of accusations and speculation surrounding the event indicate the degree to which this incident has shocked and alarmed the country. While it is too early to draw firm conclusions, the circumstances strongly suggest that the real target of this attack was Maldives' burgeoning tourism industry. Once Post learns more from the preliminary investigations now underway, we plan to hold another EAC meeting to assess our plans for Maldives Friendship Week, November 3-7.
BLAKE